

Briefing Statement

Bureau: National Park Service
Issue: White-tailed Deer Management
Park Site: Valley Forge National Historical Park
Date: September 20, 2007

Background:

- Valley Forge National Historical Park (NHP), an administrative unit of the national park system, is located near King of Prussia, Pennsylvania. The park, designated by the United States Congress on July 4, 1976, comprises 3,466 acres.
- White-tailed deer population monitoring between 1997 and 2006 indicates an increase in deer density from 154 to 244 deer per square mile within Valley Forge NHP. Current deer density is approximately 14 times greater than the state's recommended deer density to maintain forest regeneration.
- In 2000, Congress directed the NPS to develop a plan to address the issue of deer management at Valley Forge NHP. The 2006 House Appropriations report reaffirmed this directive: *"The public has been patient as the NPS has worked through its process in regard to management of the over-abundance of white-tailed deer at the park. Within existing funds, NPS is directed to begin the environmental impact statement for deer management. The Committee expects that the plan will be funded fully so that it can be completed in fiscal year 2008. The Committee further expects that implementation of the selected action will begin immediately upon signing of the Record of Decision."*
- The substantial increase in deer population size within Valley Forge NHP over the last two decades seems to correlate with significant changes in the species composition, abundance and distribution of native plant communities and alteration of natural processes such as forest regeneration.
- A deer management plan is needed at this time because: (1) An increasing number of deer over the past two decades has resulted in undersirable changes in the species composition, structure, abundance, and distribution of native plant communities and associated wildlife; and (2) Browsing of tree and shrub seedlings by deer prevents the ability of native forests to grow and mature.
- Preparation for commencing a deer management plan is complete, including documentation of density and movement, a General Management Plan / EIS, and a cultural landscape management plan.
- The purpose of this plan/EIS is to develop a deer management strategy that supports long-term protection, preservation, and restoration of native vegetation and other natural and cultural resources.

Status:

- The National Park Service began preparation of a white-tailed deer management plan and environmental impact statement for Valley Forge NHP in 2006. Several key tasks have been completed:
 - (1) The Notice of Intent, a requirement of the *National Environmental Policy Act* (NEPA) and the regulations of the Council on Environmental Quality, was published in the Federal Register;
 - (2) Internal scoping to develop the purpose, need for action, objectives, and preliminary management strategies was completed;
 - (3) Formal public scoping meetings were held on November 8 and 9, 2006; and
 - (4) During the public comment period, which ended on December 8, 2006, a total of 164 pieces of correspondence were received with 343 comments. A Public Comment Analysis Report is complete and is available on the park's website;
 - (5) In 2007, after resolution of a delay in fund availability, plan development continued. Science Team meetings were held from January to March for the purpose of providing science-based input to the park on issues relevant to managing white-tailed deer within the park, such as deer density and desired conditions for vegetation. Comments from the public and the work of the Science Team were used to revise the purpose, need for action, and objectives, and to continue development of management alternatives. Five possible alternatives for managing deer have been identified and now are being further developed. They are: existing management (no action); fencing of targeted vegetation communities with fertility treatments for the deer; lethal reduction; and lethal reduction with fertility treatments. The potential environmental impacts of each alternative are being assessed.
- A draft of the White-tailed Deer Management Plan/EIS is expected to be printed for public review in spring, 2008.

Communications:

- Information will be available for public review and comment at local public libraries, the park Web site (<http://www.nps.gov/vafo>), and the Planning, Environment and Public Comment (PEPC) Web site (<http://parkplanning.nps.gov>).

Congressional Districts:

Pennsylvania:

Jim Gerlach – 6th Congressional District

Joe Sestak – 7th Congressional District

Bob Casey – U.S. Senate

Arlen Specter – U.S. Senate

Contact:

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